

TOK discussion

From the beginning of the revolution under Madero's Plan de San Luis Potosi and through the work of President Cárdenas, the meaning, expectations, reasons for revolution and results varied during this 30-year period.

Write a one-page response to either of the following questions.

- 1 To what degree did the two sides of this revolution find an equilibrium? What discourse helped them to achieve it or move away from it? In what ways did reason find a place in this revolution?
- 2 Discuss or think about the difference between reasoning about means and reasoning about ends. Is one more prevalent than the other in the Mexican Revolution?

In light of the Mexican Revolution and the opposing groups consider the following questions.

- 1 To what extent are the groups aware of each other's assumptions?
- 2 To what extent are the groups conscious of their own assumptions?
- 3 In what ways do the values in areas each group considers to be most important or most moral affect their knowledge of the revolution?
- 4 In what ways do the opposing groups differ in the set of facts they consider relevant or essential?
- 5 To what extent do they use different forms of justification to support their conclusions, and are these just?

In a one-page response answer the following question.

To what extent did the classification systems (peasants, labourers, business, military and government) affect the knowledge each class attained through the revolution?

2.5 Impact of the revolution on women, the arts, education, music and literature

Conceptual understanding

Key questions

- In what ways did women and their role change due to the Mexican Revolution?
- How did the arts change and incorporate the revolution?
- In what ways did the revolution affect education?
- How was music and literature changed due to the revolution?

Key concepts

- Change
- Perspectives

Women during the revolution

Soldaderas

When men left their homes to fight in the Mexican Revolution, they often left their families behind. In the rural areas of Mexico this left women susceptible to rape and kidnapping by bandits or marauding revolutionary armies. Because of this many women began following their men to the battlefield to be safer and also to continue their supportive roles as wife and mother.

These women became known as soldaderas, as they followed men around Mexico from battlefield to battlefield, doing a variety of tasks, including setting up camp, cleaning for the soldiers, cooking for when they returned from battle, hauling equipment, gathering water and firewood, building shelters to protect the men from the elements, caring for the horses and other animals they had brought along, and being in charge of medical care at times. Many would go so far as to say that without these women there may not have been a revolution as many of the men would have returned home. Many rebels were able to fight because these women literally carried their homes on their backs, brought their families and followed their men, doing all they could to make battlefield life easier.

Some of the more ambitious soldaderas picked up weapons and swelled the ranks of the military, involving themselves in every capacity of the military except for the highest-ranking positions. They fought in many battles, fired weapons, distributed ammunition before battles, and became involved in espionage and propaganda for their armies. At times some of the soldaderas obtained battle reports, distributed gear and carried dispatches.

Some of these women became famous for their fighting, leading men into battle, fighting in over 100 different confrontations, some even



▲ A soldadera

forming their own brigade of women. None are as well known as Amelia Robles who fought her way up to the status of colonel, sleeping with her pistol, smoking a cigar and one of the few after the revolution to earn a veteran's pension for her efforts.

Not all women during the revolution lived the life of a *soldadera*. Many that stayed at home filled some of the jobs the men abandoned, worked to help their families and also to support the revolutionary efforts. Many found jobs on newspapers, founding girls' schools or working as telephone operators, forming the largest group of women in the economy under the telephone workers union, *Sindicato de Telefonistas de la República Mexicana*. Many tried to keep their jobs after the revolution or moved to the city to find work. These working women and the *soldaderas* used their experiences to fight for women's rights from the 1930s.

Education policies

Before the revolution, schools throughout Mexico were run by the Catholic Church or regional governments, making them mainly accessible for the elite and wealthy. The various educational standards held by the different regional governments led to many inadequacies with devastating results such as an 80% illiteracy rate. For these reasons education became a major concern for presidents in the post-revolutionary era.

Obregón and education

President Obregón established the Secretariat of Public Education (SPE) and appointed José Vasconcelos to be its First Minister. He was in charge of all public education: primary, secondary, as well as state colleges and universities. He also ended up developing a network of vocational schools to help teach adults new skills like farming, reading and writing. Vasconcelos believed that the Indian population was a hindrance to social and economic progress and needed to be educated and assimilated, so he had thousands of new schools built, mostly in rural areas to help change the life and culture of the peasants and farmers. These schools taught the basics of education, hygiene and health care, the Spanish language and Mexican history and geography.

Vasconcelos also started a magazine called the *El Maestro* in order to assist rural teachers in their instruction and content. He reprinted "classics" like Homer and Cervantes and had thousands printed and taken to schools all over the nation, also supplying them with "readers" that helped people improve their reading. Vasconcelos also increased the number of libraries across the nation, giving people access to books to read. There were more than 1900 libraries by the time he left office. In opposition to the political beliefs of President Calles he resigned in 1924.

Calles and education

This left the office open for Calles to appoint José Puig Casauranc to the head of the SPE from 1924–1928. Casauranc was greatly persuaded by Under-secretary Moisés Sáenz who in turn was influenced by John Dewey, who believed in educating through practical experiences. He combined this theory of education with his ideas to stress nationalism

and Mexican history, focusing on the positive goals of the revolution. Casauranc also wanted to expand rural schools and their access to education, which he did but he also gave them access to gardens, orchards and animals to take care of in order to make their education more practical. With the expansion of rural schools the number of teachers increased as well as regular student attendance. His focus was also on the assimilation of the Indian culture, teaching them Spanish and Mexican history. Schools under Casauranc became centres of their communities, offering classes in art, music and general health. He opened a small number of model primary schools in the capitals so that other schools would have a model of effective teaching methods. Arguably his greatest contribution was the building of a number of central agricultural schools that came with 2500 acres of agricultural land where new farming techniques were taught alongside general schooling.

While Vasconcelos allowed Catholic schools to continue to operate independently, President Calles shut down all Catholic schools. This coincided with the Cristero rebellion and caused major disruption to the student attendance that both Vasconcelos and Casauranc had built up.

Education in Mexico would struggle for a short time from 1928 to 1930, as the SEP saw four different ministers rotate through the office leading to a lack of cohesion in expectations and hampering any significant progress. This changed when Narciso Bassols came to the SPE for the last years of the Maximato, from 1931 to 1934.

Bassols was a socialist and had the responsibility of carrying out Calles' socialist education plan to include science and technology in schools. Like those before him, his goal also focused on the rural population, wanting to educate the campesino population in the hope that they would increase agricultural output, thus improving their local economies. He published *El Maestro Rural*, a teaching magazine assisting teachers in their classrooms, and a tool for communicating expectations to rural teachers and students. He also ensured the supply of better prepared graduates of the *Escuelas Normales*, the teacher training college to teach in schools.

Under Calles' socialist education plan, Bassols implemented a sex education curriculum that met stiff opposition in most places, especially in rural communities. With parents' consent and encouragement the students protested against the curriculum as they saw it as unnecessary and because it clashed with their religion and traditions. Teachers also began to protest and oppose Bassols when he wanted to begin to assess teachers. Facing such stiff opposition from students and teachers, Bassols resigned.

Cárdenas and education

Cárdenas came into office and appointed a new SPE leader, Gonzalo Vázquez Vela, who ran the office until 1940, throughout Cárdenas' tenure as president. Much of this is covered in the Cárdenas presidency section (page 102). Vázquez was given an increased budget of nearly 15% of the total national budget. With that he focused his attention, like those before him, on the rural population, especially after the disturbances of the Cristero rebellion. He would oversee the construction of more than 4000 rural schools and increase student enrolment by more than 50%.

Vázquez added to the common theme of the SPE of assimilating the indigenous population through education to make them more productive for the overall community and nation.

Arts

Muralist movement

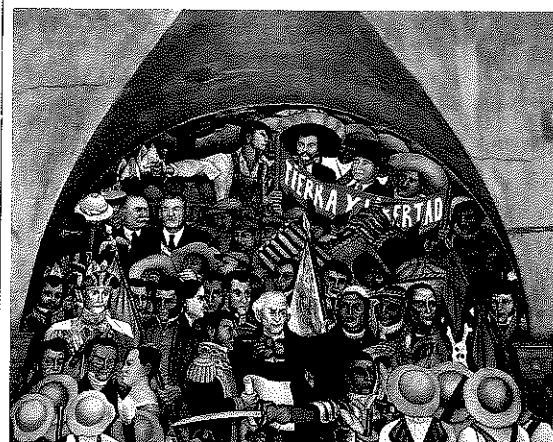
The revolution sparked a burst of creative thought that manifested itself in images of Mexican history, experiences, traditions, culture, nationalism and the future. This creatively was best portrayed through the muralist movement, sometimes known as the Mexican Renaissance, led by Los Tres Grandes (The Three Great Ones): José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. These artists tried to define a new post-revolutionary Mexico through their art, in the hope of educating the illiterate population to instill pride in the past and yet focus on the realities of the present day. Their murals were large public displays so that more people could see them. They used Mexican culture, revolution and nationalism.

In 1922 SPE minister Vasconcelos recruited Orozco, Rivera and Siqueiros to paint large communal mural projects as a means to instill nationalism and give their analyses of the revolution and its influence on Mexico's current state. Vasconcelos gave them their first job – painting murals at the National Preparatory School in Mexico City – and it was here that the three established the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors. The group created a paper called *El Machete*, which became the official paper of the Mexican Communist Party as all three of these muralists were communists to varying degrees. Their works included communist symbols through the use of Mexican history and the people's daily struggles.

Rivera

Diego Rivera was touring Europe, gathering inspiration and ideas from frescoes, when Vasconcelos recruited him, getting him to return home and use his art in public spaces for the betterment of Mexico. After returning and touring the Yucatan he received his first job under Vasconcelos – a painting at the National Preparatory School. Here he painted his first large-scale mural called "Creation", showing the nature of arts and sciences. The students at the school, not used to such progressive ideas and art, were offended and tried to destroy the piece. He eventually finished within a year but was unhappy with the heavy European influence in it and wanted to include more Mexican ideals and influences in future pieces.

He completed other works at the SPE headquarters, the National School of Agriculture, the National Palace and the Cortés Palace in Cuernavaca under such titles as "Life of Zapata", "The Rural Teacher", "The Liberated Earth", "Natural Forces Controlled by Humanity", "Epic of the Mexican People", and the "Liberation of the Peon". They all portrayed the glories and injustices of the revolution and of Mexico through the peasants, indigenous population and revolutionary events. He worked hard to reflect Mexican social life as he interpreted it.



▲ "History of Mexico from the Conquest to 1930" by Diego Rivera

In the early thirties, while in exile in the US, he did a number of works, most notably for the Museum of Modern Art and the Rockefeller Center in New York. The pieces reflected the social abundances of the 1920s in the US, while showing the contradictions he saw in capitalism. His use of communist symbols got him fired and his piece at the Rockefeller Center was destroyed when he refused to change it. He would later return to Mexico to do more works of art after his short time in the US.

Orozco

Orozco began his career as a cartoonist in the press during the revolution. He lived through the revolution and saw the horrors of it, not only death, but also the dishonesty and deceitfulness of the generals and politicians getting more for themselves at the expense of the masses. His paintings reflected much of this through tragic images of human imperfection that evoke sadness and pity in their viewers.

He was employed to do his first work at the National Preparatory Academy, and like Rivera's mural, his two murals were not widely accepted and nearly destroyed by the students. His two murals were "Reactionary Forces" and "Christ Destroys His Cross", the latter showing Christ destroying his cross because he was not happy with what people had become. He completed several other murals, "The Trench", "Cores and Malinche", "Omniscience", "The Destruction of the Old Order", "The Strike" and "The Rich Banquet While the Workers Fight" before leaving for the US.

Like the other two muralists, he spent the beginning of the 1930s in the US painting murals. He did several works in California, New York and Dartmouth College. In these works he proudly displayed the history of Mexico but also his critique of what he saw as the deception of capitalism. Later he returned to Mexico to do some of his most famous pieces: "Man on Fire", "Political and Ideological Exploitation" and "Hidalgo". These increasingly focused on Mexico's culture and proud history but also the unreliability of humans and how it led to greed and the exploitation of others.

Siqueiros

Siqueiros was a muralist but with a very different background and social agenda than the others. He was a revolutionary soldier who had fought and witnessed the tragedies of the revolution and was now a political activist. He found himself exiled from Mexico and in prison for his political activities on a number of different occasions. He spent time in Europe learning from the French and Italian influences and even spent time with Rivera in Italy.



▲ "Del Porfirismo a la Revolución" by David Siqueiros



▲ "Zapatistas Marching" by José Orozco

He was contracted to paint his first mural for Mexico under Vasconcelos at the National Preparatory School just as the other two had. His mural “Burial of a Martyred Worker” showed the oppression of Mexican labour juxtaposed by the freedom of death. The students tried to destroy the work as they had Rivera’s and Orozco’s.

After this he was forced to leave Mexico because of his political activities, and went to the US where he was contracted to do work, mainly in California. He created two large murals, “America Tropical” and “Workers Meeting”, both of which critiqued American imperialism and capitalist oppression, and displayed unions, interracial relations and racial unity, none of which were widely accepted in the US at that time. Subsequently both murals were covered and destroyed and his work visa was not renewed.

From here he left for South America where he started to develop the processes and techniques that would make him famous. He believed in continual experimentation with different techniques and new technologies. He developed a process of spraying a base for his murals out of pyroxylin paint and attempted to make his art stand out and not be so one dimensional by using polyangular perspectives. He returned to Mexico in 1939 at the end of Cárdenas’ tenure in office and painted “Portrait of the Bourgeoisie”, a visual struggle between the evils of fascism and democracy. Siqueiros created works that were full of political and social content, which later in his career included the struggle against emerging fascism.

The muralist movement was a large collection of historical reflections on Mexico that incorporated the impending concepts of industry and the future. All the muralists drew upon their connections with the revolution and the culture of Mexico, but they portrayed their interpretations differently. Although all of them showed Marxist influences, Rivera drew attention to the indigenous and labouring population in Mexico, while Siqueiros focused on political, social and future themes in his paintings, and Orozco drew attention to the flaws of humans and what those flaws could lead to. All of them drew ideas from the nation’s past while also looking to the future realities of the industrial world.

TOK discussion

Muralists and novelists shared their perceptions, realities and knowledge of the revolution through their art and writing.

- 1 In what ways were the artists’ use of emotions necessary and/or problematic in their sharing of the revolution?
- 2 In what ways did the arts help others understand the history of the revolution?
- 3 In what ways did muralists use culture to understand the revolution and portray it in their murals?

Music

Music during and after the revolution very much reflected the ideals and sacrifices made by the soldiers and their loved ones during the fighting. They used the various ideas and themes of the revolution and coupled them after the revolution with the new emergence of mass media, namely radio and production.

During the revolution brass bands followed the armies, reflecting the regional traditions of music and instruments. Music and dancing were a significant component in the revolutionary armies as they would play music after wins, losses and even during battles to motivate the soldiers. Corridos, or Mexican ballads, were around before the revolution but their association with the fighting brought them to the forefront. These corridos incorporated simple language and became a communication tool to share stories and news of the revolution throughout the country. These narratives of social events were sung by soldiers around the fire at night, and usually had political undertones, themes of land reform, nationalism and women as a romantic theme. They used authentic and traditional musical instruments to accompany these songs. The revolution certainly popularized this style of music, but when the revolution ended and technology entered the world of music, it all started to change.

Styles started to change in the twenties and thirties. Girls started to cut their hair short, raised their skirt lengths and discovered the dance floor. This type of girl was known as “Chica Moderna”, the modern girl. The radio was now delivering music to almost everyone across the nation and recording studios started to refine the sound quality. Radio stations not only helped the popularity of songs, artists and types of music but also helped foster a nightlife among young professionals, hence the Chica Moderna.

Mariachi was traditional rural music that used only stringed instruments and voice. In the 1930s they gained national popularity. The mariachi bands began to tour the country, and even the US. A mariachi band accompanied President Cárdenas across Mexico on his campaign tour. The mariachis soon adopted trumpets because of the influence of the big band in the US.

Music helped heal a torn nation during and after the revolution. It was an avenue in which polarizing populaces, whether it be government, Church, rural or urban, could meet on common ground. Much of the music development was pushed by technology, which improved the style, sound and delivery, but Mexico’s most famous music stems from the influences of the revolution.

Literature

A new literary genre emerged from the revolution known as “Novels of the Revolution”. This genre included hundreds of novels by as many authors inspired by the events of the revolution. One of the most famous authors of this genre is Mariano Azuela. He was a doctor during the revolution, and saw many of the tragedies that took place. He wrote *The Underdogs*, one of the first and most popular stories of its time. Most of these stories, like Azuela’s, are based on the revolution and real events. They often dark, showing the loss and disorder that took place, but trying to show the heroic side of the revolution as well. Other stories in this genre are: *They Gave Us the Land* by Juan Rulfo, *The Edge of the Storm* by Agustín Yáñez, *The Shadow of the Caudillo* by Martín Luis Guzmán, and Nellie Campobello, a famous woman writer who wrote titles including *Cartucho* and *Notes on the Military Life of Francisco Villa*. A later generation wrote stories based on the events from the revolution as well, like Carlos Fuentes’ *The Old Gringo*.

ATL Thinking and social skills

Examine at least one photo of a revolution-inspired artwork. Discuss the points of revolution present and the underlying themes of the revolution in each work.

All of this literature was a reflection of and inspired by the events of the Mexican Revolution. While it was very much intended to bring people's attention to the dark but very real side of the revolution, it also revealed the authentic source of nationalistic pride the revolution inspired.

Conclusion

The 1910 revolution was brought about through the demands of lower classes who felt they were ignored by the oligarchy that dominated the Porfiriato. This attitude stemmed from unrealized desires set forth by the 1857 Constitution. They had forced their issues and problems to the forefront, although these would evolve as the revolution progressed. Revolutionary heroes would champion the revolutionary cause as many of them would rise and fall during this time in Mexican history. When the 1917 Constitution was created from the turbulence of the revolution, it addressed many of the initial issues raised when the revolution began. The post-revolutionary leaders in Mexico would use this document and their experience of fighting in the revolution to lead Mexico in the years ahead.

The post-revolutionary state in Mexico saw much of the political support come from the common labourer, rather than the wealthy elite and foreign investors. This gained Mexico respect from the masses but also foreign countries. During this time Mexican leaders like Obregón, Calles and Cárdenas would for the most part fulfill and enforce all that had been fought for, although this fulfillment of revolutionary goals would take time and to some degree be done through political control and economic development. This period, however, did see an increase in Mexican nationalism. Just as many of the issues that were raised in 1910 were being answered, the onset of technology and industry advanced Mexico into a technologically and economically developed country, which in turn caused new problems for the country. The revolution and all that came after, however, gave Mexico an infrastructure to handle these new emerging problems.

Exam-style questions

- 1 Who deserves the title of "Father of the Mexican Revolution" and why?
- 2 Evaluate the extent to which the leaders of the Mexican Revolution could be considered as either "revolutionaries" or "reformers."
- 3 Analyse the causes of the Mexican Revolution of 1910.
- 4 "By the end of the 1920s the original objectives of the Mexican Revolution had been abandoned." To what extent do you agree with this judgment?
- 5 Examine the major stages of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920).
- 6 "The Mexican Revolution was a revolt of the impoverished many against the wealthy few." To what extent do you agree with this statement?